



# Consuming the city in passing: guided visits and the marketing of difference in Cartagena de Indias (Colombia)

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**Consuming the city in passing: guided visits and the marketing of difference in Cartagena de Indias (Colombia)**

**Abstract:** This article treats the performance of difference in the tourist presentation of Cartagena de Indias, on the Colombian Caribbean coast. The authors centre their analysis on the “paseo en chiva”, a guided tour in a folkloristic bus which travels from one tourist site to another, to show how the city becomes an object of consumption through which the local history and culture emerge as easily appropriable global products and signs. Principal site of the slave trade in the territory of New Grenada and contemporary incarnation of a Spanish colonial past, Cartagena is particularly congruous for consideration of the identities of the city and those within it, identities which allude to the marketing of black culture and bodies, and to the evocation of the mestizaje associated with Latin America. At the crossroads between urban and ethnic studies, this article proposes an analysis of the production of a place in which differences are (faceted as) tourist resources which can be consumed itinerantly, thus producing a history and identities which, standardized and stereotyped, in turn act upon the relation of the inhabitants to their city.

**Key words :** Tourism – City – Ethnicity – Itinerant consumption – Black culture

**Consommer la ville en passant : visites guidées et marketing de la différence à Cartagena de Indias (Colombie)**

**Résumé :** Cet article traite de la mise en scène de la différence dans la présentation touristique de Cartagena de Indias, sur la côte Caraïbe colombienne. En se centrant sur la pratique du *paseo en chiva*, visite guidée dans un bus folklorique qui circule d'un lieu touristique à un autre, il s'agit de montrer comment la ville se transforme en objet de consommation, à travers lequel l'histoire et la culture locales deviennent des produits et des signes aisément appropriables globalement. Ancien port d'entrée des esclaves sur le territoire de la Nouvelle Grenade, mais aussi incarnation d'un passé colonial espagnol, Cartagena se prête particulièrement à une réflexion sur les identités *de* et *dans* la ville, qui se réfère tout autant à la commercialisation de la culture et du corps noirs qu'à l'évocation d'un métissage associé à l'Amérique latine. Au croisement entre études sur la ville et sur l'ethnicité, cet article propose une analyse de la production d'un lieu dans lequel les différences sont autant de ressources touristiques, pouvant être consommées tout en déambulant, produisant ainsi une histoire et des identités standardisées et stéréotypées qui agissent en retour sur le rapport des habitants à leur ville.

**Mots-clés :** Tourisme – Ville – Ethnicité – Consommation ambulante – Culture noire

**Consumir la ciudad paseando: visitas con guías y marketing de la diferencia en Cartagena de Indias (Colombia)**

**Resumen:** Este artículo trata de la puesta en escena de la diferencia en la presentación turística de Cartagena de Indias, en la costa Caribe colombiana. Al centrarse en la práctica del “paseo en Chiva”, visita con guía en un autobús popular que circula de un lugar turístico a otro, se trata de mostrar cómo la ciudad se transforma en objeto de consumo, a través del cual la historia y la cultura local se convierten en productos y signos fácilmente apropiables a nivel global. Antiguo puerto de entrada de los esclavos al territorio de la Nueva Granada, y también símbolo del pasado colonial español, Cartagena se presta muy bien a una reflexión sobre las identidades *en* y *de* la ciudad, que se refiere tanto a la comercialización de la cultura y del cuerpo negros que a la evocación de un mestizaje asociado a América Latina. Entre estudios sobre la ciudad y sobre la etnicidad, este texto propone un análisis de la producción de un lugar en el cual las diferencias son recursos turísticos, que pueden ser consumidos durante el paseo. El turismo construye así una historia y unas identidades estandarizadas y

estereotipadas que tienen consecuencias sobre la relación de los habitantes con su ciudad.

Palabras claves: Turismo – Ciudad – Etnicidad – Consumo ambulante – Cultura negra

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## **Consuming the city in passing: guided visits and the marketing of difference in Cartagena de Indias (Colombia)<sup>1</sup>**

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Engaged in global competition for the development of their cultural and tourist attractiveness, cities must commercialize what Sharon Zukin calls their place: “the place in this sense is a form of location rendered so special by economy and demography that it instantly conjures up an image: Detroit, Chicago, Manhattan, Miami” (Zukin, 1991, p. 12). In this process, culture has become a qualifier and a primary tool for “performing” cities and their specificity. Their cultural offering and wealth in heritage are henceforth an asset for attracting leading businesses and their executives, who constitute substantial cultural consumers (Gibson, 2005 ; Zukin, 1995). They are also an asset to the development of the tourism industry which, for urban developers, increasingly consists of representing the city as an “entertainment machine” (Lloyd & Clark, 2000). As such, not only does the distinction between tourism and other aspects of culture appear blurred, but also the tourist-based modes of staging, visualizing and experiencing progressively shift to the center of other domains of social life (Wood, 1998). As noted R. Lloyd and T. Clark (2000), “Residents increasingly act like tourists in their own cities”. But at play in this transformation of urban centers, increasingly represented as tourist sites in which the inhabitants themselves stroll about as if they too were tourists, is the passage of the figure of the *passer-by* to that of the *itinerant consumer*. Sociological literature associates the former with characteristics of public urban space – eccentricity and accessibility (Joseph, 1984), non-territoriality and the paradoxical hospitality of a place without host (Bordreuil, 2000) – and recognizes his capacities as knowing how to maintain a polite distance (Giddens, 1994) and remain foreign to each other while still taking each other into account (Quéré, 1992). The new figure of the *itinerant consumer*, however, engages in a commercial relationship in an urban space that is itself laid out as a center of cultural consumption.

In this framework, the staging of the “authenticity” of local traditions, diversity or cultural differences, presented as part of the city’s immaterial heritage, is also part of a territorial marketing logic subject to an imperative of “acceptability”: the image must be positive, attractive, transposable (Le Bart, 1999). This entails proposing a tourist space in which the population’s diversity and cultural differences are points of attraction and in which the local resources can be transformed into items of consumption (“ethnic” craftsmanship, cultural productions, visits to villages, festivals of music or traditional dance, attraction parks...). At the same time, this territorial marketing based on the cultural promotion of a location involves another process: attributing value to products susceptible of being purchased by a targeted public in societies increasingly considered multiethnic or multicultural, and suggesting to individuals to construct and express ethnic and cultural identities through the consumption of specific goods and services (Sengès, 2003).

Patricia Hill Collins (2006) offers approaches for analysis of the process of globalized consumption of the other, incarnated here by the “black” individual who, placed in the current context of an expanding ethnic market and increasing global exchanges, also connotes the

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a French version published in *Espaces et Sociétés*, No. 135, 2008. The translation was made by Laura Schuft, PhD student at the University of Nice – URMIS.

system of slavery which had already transformed the black body into an object of economic production and sexual fantasy<sup>2</sup>. The representation of the “black” individual is now conveyed through a rationale of consumption: “I suggest that shifting the focus of class analysis from production to consumption provides a better understanding of black youth” (2006: 299). The question is therefore to understand “how young African American women and men participate in new forms of commoditization that sell blackness in the global marketplace” (2006: 297). In this fashion Patricia Hill Collins elucidates the mechanisms of the commercialization of a succinct black culture, sought by white youth who procure ethnic signs on a globalized market, without questioning their own lifestyle or, more importantly, the hierarchical structures and power relations. For all it may reveal, the contribution of Patricia Hill Collins (see also West, 2001) is no less a reflection of the conception of “race relations” anchored in the Anglo-Saxon social and scientific context and which stresses the bipolar character of racial categorizations. One of the interests of Hill Collins’ analysis, is that it refers to the racially segregated society of the United States, when in contrast, articles dealing with the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking Americas and Caribbean, in relation to which we situate our own work, have traditionally highlighted a minimal form of racial cleavages, generally explained by the predominance of mixing<sup>3</sup> (Hoetink, 1967 ; Solaún et Kronus, 1973 ; Wagley, 1994 ; Bastide, 1996). Are the conclusions of Patricia Hill Collins still valid in a place like Cartagena? Is afrocaribbean Colombian blackness also commercialized in a globalized market?

In this article we wish to investigate the role of ethnicity in an urban context, in terms of staging and reification, which stresses a rationale of commercializing difference, whether territorial or cultural. The city of Cartagena, on the Caribbean coast of Colombia, lends itself in particular to this double approach. At the focus of policies for patrimonial promotion (national monument in 1940, World Heritage of Humanity in 1984), recently expressed through the development of cultural tourism and an escalation of international events<sup>4</sup>, this city which combines historical wealth and infrastructural modernity has rapidly become consumable world-wide, a sort of globalized village in a country otherwise stigmatized on the international scene. Moreover, Cartagena responds to the quest of exoticism without risk, blending tropical imagery with the fantasies associated with the Afro-Caribbean world, while being situated in the reassuring framework of a Spanish colonial city.

This article shall first discuss the socio-historical context particular to Cartagena and the introduction of tourism in the city. We shall also see how the visitor becomes a consumer of standardized cultural differences, while moving around the city thanks to the *paseo en chiva*, a tour organized in a bus that is itself rendered folkloric. Focusing on the dialogue of tourist guides, we shall then attempt to bring to date the mechanisms of construction of a mixed discourse on a city that is also presented as mixed, producing an easily appropriable past. Lastly, with nightfall on this postcard setting, we shall observe how a sensual and festive representation has been portrayed of this city of European, Indian and African heritage,

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<sup>2</sup> In a totally different context (Hawaiï), Jane Desmond (1999) analyzes the touristic construction of “ideal native” as a mixture that does not enter the black and white dichotomy but which similarly emphasizes the “physical foundationalism” of the tourist industry.

<sup>3</sup> The binary opposition between North American and Latin American models has nonetheless been greatly nuanced, even contested, since the 1980s (Skidmore, 1993 ; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> In 2007, Cartagena hosts an international meeting of writers (Hay Festival), the 6<sup>th</sup> International Congress of the Spanish Language, the annual conference of the Inter American Press Association, the 18<sup>th</sup> conference of the World Tourism Organization, the MTV Latin Awards ceremony, the 47<sup>th</sup> International Film Festival, the conference of the Travel Mart Latin American, etc.

representation which involves the staging of characteristics associated with the Afro-Caribbean culture and body.

### **From the periphery of the nation to the exotic Caribbean: the development of tourism in Cartagena**

In Colombian history, the Caribbean region, like that of the Pacific or the Amazon, was relegated to the periphery of the Nation (Múnera, 1998) owing to a combination of racial, territorial and cultural elements. “The evocation of the Coast inevitably evokes images of palm trees, *cumbia*<sup>5</sup> and joyful dark-skinned people” (Gilard, 1984 : 231-233). The Republic symbolizes the rejection of Cartagena, set to the margins of a country, defines itself by its Andean and continental character and views the coastal regions as zones of socio-economic under-development with second-rate citizens, division which finds its origins in the climate (Caldas, 1966), the racial composition of the population (López de Mesa, 1934) or the festive and lascivious nature of the cultural practices. It must be specified that this process of hierarchical organization does not stem exclusively from the Andean center: it results just as much from the reproduction of inferiorizing classifications by the local elite. Over the past few years, however, the value of the Caribbean region has been enhanced<sup>6</sup>, not through the abandonment of cultural, racial or territorial stereotypes, but through setting these in scene, which has rendered them normalized and at the same time exotic. Thus, difference has become an item of consumption that the other can indulge in without danger, making the far-away accessible. In this process, tourism plays a central role<sup>7</sup>.

In the 1960s and 70s, the development of tourism became one of the national priorities, particularly during the presidency of Lleras Restrepo (1966-1970) at which time the *Corporación Nacional de Turismo* was created, destined to increase investment in the tourism sector of Colombia and to promote this on a national and international level. Benefiting from a geographical site favorable to seaside recreation and the potential to host tourism infrastructures, Cartagena appeared as the spearhead of this new policy, the implementation of which produced considerable effects on the city's development in a number of areas. As noted the American anthropologist Joel Streicker, “By the late 1970s and early 1980s tourism had significantly changed the social, economic, and political landscape of Cartagena. Local and national elites - including drug traffickers - built high-rise hotels and vacation condominiums, and set up jewellery stores, restaurants, boutiques, discoteques, and tourist agencies on the narrow peninsula-neighborhood named Bocagrande. Government and private tourist promoters succeeded in drawing mainly North American tourists for recreational (sun, sand, and sex) and cultural tourism, the latter focusing on the city's spectacular colonial fortifications and buildings” (Streicker, 1997, p. 527).

There is nonetheless a discrepancy between the importance of the phenomenon to socially construct Cartagena as a tourist destination – the theme of tourism, its development, the

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<sup>5</sup> Afro-Caribbean folkloric music.

<sup>6</sup> It is doubtlessly thanks to Gabriel García Márquez that the Caribbean has come back in force on the national scene, becoming a vector of regional contestation. The Barranquilla Group was among the first to promote a Caribbean identity, enhance the value of the region's specificity and assert cultural originality. It is revelatory that, progressively, the terms “caribeño” and “Caribe” replaced those of “costeño” and “Costa” in popular language, thus indicating the passage from a negative identity assigned through opposition (interior/coast or Andes/coast) to an affirmative identification with a new space.

<sup>7</sup> It should be specified that identification with the Caribbean is today a general movement, not limited to tourism and expressed by multiple social actors of varying interests: intellectuals and academics, political leaders, cultural movements, etc.

reception of visitors and the politics surrounding the city's representation being ultra present in the political and media discourse and currently constituting one of the axes of the strategy of the President of the Republic to improve the image of Colombia in the world – and the relatively minimal amount of tourist arrivals in comparison to other destinations of the Caribbean. In quantifiable measurements, international tourism indeed appears to be very minimally developed due precisely to the devastating image of Colombia in the world. In 2002, for example, 50,000 people arrived from abroad at the Cartagena airport<sup>8</sup>. In comparison, the same year, Cancun or the Dominican Republic received close to three million (Quintero, Bernal, López : 2005).

The association of Cartagena with the Caribbean appears thus as a double escape, from the marginalization of the region on the national scene and from the stigmatization of the country on an international level. The objective, for the local social actors, is thus to “sell the Colombian Caribbean”<sup>9</sup> by readily adopting cultural characteristics that are presented as distinctive. “To the charms of its past, the city unites the *joie de vivre* of a population and the Caribbean flavor, joyous and carefree” (*Cartagena de Indias Convention and Visitors Bureau*, presentation brochure).

In this context, the process that consisted of portraying the Caribbean Coast and its population as a far-off, “wild” and “undisciplined” otherness during the construction of the nation is compatible with today's manner of presenting Cartagena as an exotic destination – even in the eyes of Colombians – in which one of the main attractions, provided that the image of the hostile “other” is transformed into a domesticable and domesticated “other”, relies upon performing its “local color” which continuously plays upon cultural and territorial differences, which are often implicitly racialized in the tourism discourse. As accentuated once again Joel Streicker, “Though race never figures in tourist brochures' texts advertising the city, blacks are featured in photos as part of the “local color”: silhouetted against a sunset while tossing a fishing net into the sea, paddling a white tourist couple in a canoe, selling fruit on the beach from big tin tabs balanced on their heads. The most recent poster of the Fondo Mixto de Promoción Turística de Cartagena portrays a beautiful young woman with physical features (facial, hair, and skin) most closely associated with *cachacos*<sup>10</sup>, reclining against a palm tree on a pristine beach while a black person's hands (the rest of the body is not displayed) in the foreground offer the woman a variety of tropical fruits. Clearly, the message is that Cartagena's working class is black, that it is meant to serve the tourists” (Streicker, 1997, p. 530-531). In this way, one of the effects of tourism development in Cartagena, largely financed by private initiatives and investments, is the creation of this image that presents a black population as a picturesque workforce considered part of the decoration. At the same time, it has fostered residential segregation between the neighborhoods of working-class

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<sup>8</sup> These figures are however misleading and tend to under-estimate tourism in the city in that they do not include individuals arriving in Cartagena from Bogotá – the majority – or the tourists arriving by cruise ship.

<sup>9</sup> “Tourism must be considered with audacity and imagination. As such, our aim is to create a project that is solid and capable of promoting and selling Cartagena as the pearl of the ‘continental Caribbean’ - which it is -, by promoting its patrimonial history. And presenting it, fundamentally, as a Caribbean paradise, of which the mere name is evocative and attractive. It is magic. It is fashionable. The new strategy can be an innovative way to enter into competition, with high hope, on the tourist market which, in the region, remains limited to the islands of the legendary sea of Columbus with his caravels. Millions of tourists from Europe and the United States turn to them, regarding us in a distracted fashion, neither seeing us nor showing interest in what we have or what we can offer. Notably those for whom the name “Colombia” is a synonym with insecurity and violence. We must invent a new style. And the designation ‘continental Caribbean’ conveys an unparalleled charm” (“Vender la Cartagena caribeña”, *El Universal*, 27 June 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Name given to the inhabitants of Bogotá.

housing and those where the tourists are lodged. This territorial break between the “two Cartagenas”, locally condemned (Abello, 2003 ; Noventaynueve, 2004), is doubtless one of the major effects of tourism development and the implementation of urban politics which are increasingly influenced by it (Cunin, 2004 ; Cunin et Rinaudo, 2005).

Of these “two Cartagenas”, one is designated “the most beautiful city of America” where all the investments and attention are concentrated; the other slumps in poverty, only remembered at election time, and so termed “the other Cartagena: beyond the fortifications”<sup>11</sup>. What has therefore characterized the city development, since UNESCO’s classification of the fortifications and its colonial center as World Heritage of Humanity, has been this process of transforming the historical center into a prime site of patrimonialization and tourism. Even more so has been the placement of this “city center”, patrimonial and touristy, within the world network of locations visited by the international “jet set”, and the marginalization – even the stigmatization – of the populations housed in the working-class neighborhoods situated “far from the fortifications”.

### **“Paseo en chiva” and itinerant consumption of the city**

In Cartagena, one of the principal means of visiting the historical center is the *paseo en chiva*, which in a few hours presents several sites declared to be of tourist interest, also visiting two commercial centers, one specialized in craftsmanship, the other in gold and emeralds. In activity since the beginning of the 1980’s, the *paseo en chiva* is organized by small agencies situated in the tourist sector of Bocagrande which work with the owners of the *chivas* (buses formerly used in the countryside, today reserved exclusively for tourists) and the professional guides who work on hire or sell their services from day to day (Figure No. 1). Their work consists of visiting one tourist site after another and offering a particular discourse on the city, quite distinct from the modes of description proper to the social sciences or the urban developers (Mondada, 2000). Here, there is a constant mix of practical considerations as to the organization of the tour; the enunciation of elements of local history, often in an anecdotal mode and triggered by the passage of the *chiva* before a building, statue or monument; and the presentation of infrastructures and establishments susceptible to interest the passengers (hotels, restaurants, night clubs, shops...). In this way, the *paseo en chiva* resembles a sort of tourist ritual, a quite measured, steady, codified means of discovering the city, its history, culture and population, of producing a certain vision by placing the visitor in the role of explorer who must approach as close as possible the European colonial past and the Caribbean traditions of Cartagena. In one of the *chivas*, the young cameraman who films the tour reminds the passengers at departure from Bocagrande: “You will be the main actors”, as though the tourists themselves were going to relive this local idiosyncrasy set in scene. But this tourist ritual is also the fastidious orchestration of a veritable commercial frenzy *of and in* the city, which can be seen through the solicitors and ticket sellers, the well-controlled bargaining aiming to attract clients toward one or another *chiva*, the sale of drinks, hats and sunglasses by day, maracas and chips by night, the multiple stops in front of hotels of the tourist sector with the goal of attracting new passengers, the perfectly timed visits at each monument as part of the tour with, at each site, a substantial pause consecrated to purchases, the commercial agreements with souvenir shops and jewellery stores all along the route, etc.

Certain *paseos en chivas* pass before San Felipe Fortress, symbolic of Cartagena, without the tourist group entering the fortress or receiving any explications on its history, whereas a photo-stop has nonetheless been worked into the program, at a strategic site that allows

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<sup>11</sup> “La otra Cartagena : Más allá de las Murallas”, *El Universal*, 19 August 2005.



capturing all of the imposing edifice in one picture. The itinerant vendors being clever, the photo-stop is immediately transformed into a souvenir-stop: colorful T-shirts sporting the city name, replications of Botero, the most famous of Colombian painters, *vueltaio* hats typical of the region, drawings of the old city or replications of the fortifications, appear and disappear along the stops of the *chivas* (Figure No. 2). If the bus then goes up to la Popa, it is not so much for the historical value of the convent as for the hill that offers “the most beautiful panoramic view” of the city. In fact, little by little, with the help of heat and fatigue, the guide’s commentaries are esteemed superfluous, and his function is replaced with that of assistant photographer, indicating the best angles or taking group photographs. The phrase “Now you can take pictures”<sup>12</sup>, repeated endlessly by the guide, thus becomes the leitmotif of the visit.

While descending the sinuous road which leads from La Popa to the city center, approaching the *Bóvedas*, vaulted cellars cut into the fortification that served to store ammunition and have since been turned into shops of local craftsmanship, the guide displays sudden liveliness: he looks at his watch, counts the passengers, makes several calls on his cellular telephone and speaks in a low voice with the chauffer, “number 10, number 10, you have to park in front of number 10”. The bus then stops in front of the entrance, at which time the vendors and personnel of the *chiva* align as guards of honor between the door of the bus and the door of the shop, consequently preventing the tourists from taking the wrong path. The guide is all the while guaranteed his commission on all the purchases made. Amongst the souvenirs the most sought-after are unmistakably two statuettes of women, incarnating a stereotyped ethnic otherness (Cunin, 2004): the *India Catalina*, of perfect form and mostly naked, a feather on her head, representing an Indian past as mythified as forgotten; and the *Palenquera*<sup>13</sup>, curvaceous with exuberant chest and buttocks, symbolizing a rebellious and carnal black presence.

Here, the historical dimension of the site itself remains greatly unspoken by the guides who are particularly concerned with the *chiva* stopping in front of the shop with which an agreement has been made. This usage of the fortifications reveals above all a commercialization of the city, as much by the plentiful presence of itinerant vendors around the shops, as by the behavior of the tourists themselves who are not interested in the fortifications as such (no one goes up to see them) but in the purchases they will be able to make during the stop. In this manner, the fortifications represent a symbol of the city within which one purchases other symbols of the country (coffee, pre-Colombian art, hammocks, etc.) and of the city (the statuettes of the *Palenquera* and the *India Catalina*, but also pieces of the fortification itself as a souvenir of the real fortification). It may be that, contrary to the numerous other souvenir shops present in Bocagrande where this visit begins and ends, the site of *Bóvedas* confers some authenticity to the imitation products that are sold within. The history and heritage as such are only of interest for the added value that they confer to the souvenirs which will never have so much reality as when they will be exhibited upon return from travel.

Following this stop, the *chivas* go directly to the other strategic site of shopping in Cartagena, the Pirino Gallo and its famous jewellery stores (emeralds and gold). In total, the visit of the city and its monuments lasts less than the visits to souvenir shops, without mentioning the numerous vendors met along the way. Worn out, the tourists leave with their arms full of

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<sup>12</sup> Translator’s note: this is spoken in English.

<sup>13</sup> The terms “palenquero” and “palenquera” designate the inhabitants of a “palenque”, a fortified village where fleeing slaves took refuge. The Palenque de San Basilio, promoted to the title of World Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO, is the most famous of the palenques in the region of Cartagena.

packages of Juan Valdés coffee, statues of Botero's Gorda, the *India Catalina* and the *Palenquera*, or emeralds ranging in price from 20 to 20,000 dollars.

Thus the *paseo en chiva* leads to the consumption of objects (even if a history, an "ambiance" or a diffuse identity are also sought, as we will discuss further on) which correspond to the globalized and pre-formed expectations of the tourists. In fact, before the *chiva* even departs, the city is already known thanks to a series of stereotyped images of the sites to be visited. This is reminiscent of the description of Disneyland by Marc Augé: "This was without doubt the greatest enjoyment of Disneyland: we were offered a performance that was on every point the same as what had already been advertized to us" (Augé, 1997 : 23). Travel thus becomes synonymous with verification and recognition and takes part in a prophetic past: knowing what is waiting for us and finding traces of it. Yet it is also a visit to the "anterior future" (Augé, 1997 : 26), taking on meaning later on when one can claim to have been there and produce the proof. The visit thus occurs through the mobilization of two instruments: photos and souvenirs. What remains of the trip are not so much the sites visited but rather the instantaneous visions shown through the photos brought home or the objects symbolizing a particular characteristic of the location. The city is hence reduced to a product that can be consumed anywhere.

### **The local history of mestizaje: striving to produce an easily appropriable past**

The stories recounted to tourists about the history of Cartagena go over its glorious past, from its foundation in 1534 to its declaration of independence in 1811, earning it the commendable title of "heroic city". As declared Rojek and Urry (referenced by Aitchison, 2001 : 135), "tourist practices do not simply entail the purchase of specific goods and services but involve the consumption of signs". Such is the case with the construction, by the tourist guides, of stories of a prestigious colonial history and a society characterized by harmonious mixing. This allows the visitors who stroll along with the *chiva* to dive into a clearly defined past (colonial Spain in the tropics) and to taste the charms of a city where cultures blend in perfect symbiosis.

To be considered a tourist site, it is necessary to construct a local history susceptible of being worthy of interest for the tourist. The stories of the city must therefore be immediately accessible and attractive for the individuals coming from different social contexts (Colombian visitors, Latin Americans, Europeans, North Americans) and with different incentives (beach, heritage, conferences, cruises). The performance of local specificity, by making certain differences visible, legitimizes and transforms them, while contributing to remove or exclude those differences which do not fit this orderly and standardized model of the city.

The tourist guides, merging academic and common knowledge, local and global discourse, are the principal craftsmen; they are inevitably aboard the *chivas* which mosey through the city, but also at the entrance of monuments, at the doors of hotels and at the arrival of each cruise ship. The guides present themselves as conveyors of sure information, validated by their training, their work permit and their knowledge of historians' writings on the city. A certain fetishism in regard to numbers illustrates this: the visits rely upon the propagation of dates (birth years of historical figures, dates of attacks, foundation of one or another building), at times more precise than those found in history books (independence is declared on November 11, 1811 at 11 o'clock in the morning), and the presentation of quantitative data (one guide begins his visit in this way specifying that there are 98 roads, 11 plazas and 8 churches in the historical center).

They draw their knowledge about the history of Cartagena principally from one source, the work of Eduardo Lemaitre (1983). Long-considered the official historian of Cartagena, with his *Historia general de Cartagena* which appeared in four volumes, and member of the local elite, Lemaitre conveys a history in which the working-class sectors – whether qualified in socio-economic or ethno-racial terms – are absent. This presentation hence evokes characteristics and imagery of a nation oriented toward the Andean interior, dominated by a whitening rationale. Since the 1990's however, a new historiographic trend has appeared which highlights the role of the working class and calls for a racial interpretation of history. Yet this new approach is completely ignored by the tourist guides. In their presentation of the colonial city, they reproduce and diffuse a perfectly similar discourse on the three neighborhoods that compose it: Getsemaní, the working-class neighborhood of foreigners and slaves, with low houses organized around a collective interior court; the center or Cathedral neighborhood of the economic and political elite, primarily Spanish or of Spanish descent, with its churches, its places of power, its plazas and immense colonial mansions; San Diego, the neighborhood of the middle class, of mixed population and more modest architecture, composed of houses with one or two floors. Thus, socio-economic, ethno-racial and architectural criteria of distinctions are superimposed, along with the vocabulary, both historical (the “counts”, the “freemen”, the “craftsmen”) and contemporary (social class, ethnic group), all tending to produce a homogeneous vision of each neighborhood and rendering this representation a veritable *doxa*: obvious, timeless and non-situated, fed by the knowledgeable stories of the city and popular memory.

This consensual discourse is found in the primary story of mestizaje which generally accompanies each visit and which, in a few sentences, summarizes more than 500 years of history and contact between three continents. “The tribe of Mocana Indians from the great family of the Caribs originally lived here. Later the Spanish arrived. The mix between the two gave the *mestizo*. Later came the slaves of Africa. The mix with the Spanish gave the *mulato*, and the African with the Indians, the *zambo*. The children of the Spanish are the Creoles”. As for the conclusion, it is generally always the same: “everything can mix together; that is what it means to be from Cartagena”. During the tour, the great historical figures of Cartagena are evoked in a similar manner, in a few words or with a multitude of details depending on the guide: the *India Catalina* symbolizing the Indian past of the region, the English and French pirates reminding that Cartagena has always been cosmopolitan and enabling the emphasis on the value of the “heroic city”, San Pedro Claver and his role toward the slaves, the Spanish engineers who built the fortifications, and the designers of the first independence of the city in 1811. Generally Cartagena is represented as a Spanish city (architecture, historical figures) within which transpired a perfectly harmonious racial mixing, element which requires the systematic reference to the far-off Indian ancestors and the descendants of slaves, exclusively depicted as victim to be saved or menacing rebel. The omnipresent reference to mestizaje no less hides an over-estimation of Spanish colonial greatness, a telltale sign of a society dominated by a whitening rationale (Wade, 1997).

Yet this stagnant and eternal conception of history is accompanied by a remarkable capacity for adaptation to the expectations of the passing visitors. In order to familiarize the foreigner with the monuments of the city, the guides readily delve into comparisons which have more pedagogical virtue than any historical meaning. Designating the Virgen del Carmen in Cartagena Bay, the guide, in English, refers to New York and the Statue of Liberty, addressing in particular a North American couple. Their narrations thus follow the geography of the visit more closely than the historical chronology. They tend to insist on the anecdotal aspect of the story, favoring a lively presentation. Another characteristic of the guides' discourse is the incessant going between the past and present. It is common to hear, in the

*chiva* which brings visitors from one site to another, descriptions which lead to surprising short-cuts, melding past history and present: “to your right, San Felipe Fortress, across from the Esso gas station” or “here is the Saint Pedro Claver Church which liberated the slaves; on the other side of the Bay, we see the convention center where the election of Miss Colombia takes place”. Hence, the contemporary city is interpreted in light of past events, as if history only repeated itself. “We protected ourselves from the French and English pirates, now we must protect ourselves from politicians’ swindling, from the inhabitants of Cartagena themselves.” In fact, it is common that the historical monuments are more described in respect to their current usage than their past role. In this fashion the guides tell that this magnificent colonial mansion has just been acquired by this Colombian politician, that this church dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century housed the wedding of this television star, or that this plaza hosting the statue of Pedro de Heredia, founder of the city, served as the set for a major Hollywood production. And the few lucky ones who, in addition to the *paseo en chiva*, hazard the “walking tour” (named in English) in the small streets of the center, occasionally have the opportunity to enter into one of these colonial houses restored at high cost and rivaling luxury. Profiting from the (frequent) absence of the owners and from the (self-serving) complicity of the guards, they can thus interrupt for a moment their stroll in the city with the feeling of being the hosts of these mansions of colonial charm and modern comfort. As though the symbolic consumption of the past took on a slightly more material form...

#### **“Paseo de noche”: business of festivals and ethnicity**

The tourist guides and brochures of Cartagena consecrate much energy to the festive dimension in the imagery they use to depict the city. The same goes for the local daily paper, *El Universal*, which, in its online edition, proposes a presentation of Cartagena where one can read under the title “where to go out”: “If it is true that the Caribbean blends language and music so well, it is because the heart of its population is joyous and musical, disposed to bring along all who walk this Earth. To improvise a party, one only needs a drum, a pair of maracas, a guacharaca and a group of willing friends. Likewise, the Nights of Cartagena not only inspired composers of the caliber of Jaime R. Echavarría, but also hold a sort of disinhibiting and exhilarating magic which captivates people until the end of the night” (<http://www.eluniversal.com.co>). It is no surprise in these circumstances that one of the principal guided visits of the city, greatly appreciated by the tourists, consists of a “night tour” (*paseo de noche*), also called *rumba en chiva*, the objective of which is precisely to present to tourists the festive ambiance of the city and the different highlights that make it a destination of culture and entertainment. As we can read on the website “*Cartagena Caribe*”, the *rumba en chiva* “is one of the major attractions of the nightlife in Cartagena. The festive city of wild nights is at your disposal. Visit it aboard traditional ‘chivas’, the typical buses decorated with paintings of flamboyant colors, equipped with bar filled with national liqueurs, and where a group of musicians awaits you. You will discover the city by night, that of romantic lanterns, narrow roads and outdoor cafés. You will also visit the tourist sector of Bocagrande and the residential neighborhood of Manga Island then pass through the fortified center; you will linger in a traditional *fritanga* of Cartagena to try the delicacies of the region. The tour includes a stop in a popular night club as well as a welcome cocktail” (<http://www.cartagenacaribe.com>).

Contrary to the *paseo en chiva*, the objective of the *paseo de noche* is above all festive; and the guide is replaced with a presenter assisted by a waitress called the “dama del bar” (the girl of the bar). For the occasion, as indicated in the advertisement, the different *chivas* (around ten, depending on the season and day of the week) are each accompanied by an orchestra

playing principally Vallenato and rhythms of the region, and rum is served at will. The principal attraction of the visit consists of assembling all the passengers at around 9:30 p.m. on the upper part of the fortifications, facing the sea, where a “rumba” (party) is organized, while itinerant vendors propose drinks and craftwork designed for tourists. The work of the presenter then consists of plunging the visitors into the heart of the festive culture of the Caribbean coast. They are in this way invited to experience for themselves the “Caribbean rumba”, giving them the feeling of belonging to a single festive community (Figure No. 3). The primary activity for the tourists is to take photos, not of the musicians or the fortifications, but of themselves dancing, kissing each other and showing that they are joyful. As though the importance was not so much to party but to obtain proof of having partied in Cartagena with the colonial fortifications and the Caribbean sea as background. Robert Wood highlights this in referring to the classic works of Hannerz: “In colonial Nigeria, locals who had travelled to England were referred to as ‘beentos’: they had journeyed to the political and cultural center. Today, prominently-displayed souvenirs in the homes of more and more people around the world attest to a similar pride in having ‘been to’ somewhere else and having been moved by the experience. But the world is not only increasingly full of ‘beentos’; adapting the Nigerian colloquialism, we can add that the world is also increasingly full of ‘beenseens’, people self-conscious about the fact that they are gazed upon by others” (p. 235). During the *paseo de noche*, the party is set in scene and the other identifying elements of the city are merely signs which enable to situate it.

At the same time, this staging of the festive coastal culture, presented as a combination of *joie de vivre*, nocturnal encounters and sexual attraction, celebrates a vision of the Caribbean “sol, playa y rumba” associated in a more or less explicit and more or less ambiguous manner with the blend of races and the more strictly “African” heritage. On the fortifications, “traditional” dance demonstrations like the *cumbia* and the *mapalé* exhibit both the legendary creativity of the cultural mixing and the existence of an “African” folklore which plays upon the stereotypes attributed to the black populations (see figures No. 4 and No. 5 of the representations of these dances painted on the *chivas*). On the one hand, as highlighted P. Wade, “the *cumbia* appears as a regional variant – unique in its minimalization of European influences – of a fundamental action metaphoric of the sexual encounter which leads from mixing to nationalism. This makes the *cumbia* an original form of music and traditional dance” (Wade, 2002, p.263). The *cumbia* can be seen as a local illustration of a national construction, formerly the sign of the wild character and the civilization lags of the Caribbean coast, today the symbol of the new definition of the multiethnic and multicultural nation<sup>14</sup>. In the rationale of tourism, the *cumbia* is above all one of the local productions of the three-fold ethno-racial components of the coastal culture which can henceforth be staged and consumed as an element of heritage (Figure No. 6). On the other hand, as indicate numerous tourism websites, the *mapalé* “is a dance brought to Cartagena by the blacks of Guinea, showing its African origin. It is a dance for two made of fervent and erotic movements, jumps, falls, elusions and games between the man and woman. This famous erotic dance celebrates successful fishing, in particular that of the ‘*mapalé*’, fish from which it takes its name. The *mapalé* is considered the most fervent dance of Colombian folklore”. (<http://www.americasalsa.com>). Here, this folklorized presentation of what is considered the heritage from the black population of Cartagena evokes characteristics as much natural as cultural (magical powers, corporal language, sexuality, proximity with nature) and maintains “Africa” as their supposed origin, from where they were supposedly diffused to the Caribbean (Sansone, 2003).

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<sup>14</sup> Since 1991, Colombia has defined itself as a multicultural and multiethnic nation and has adopted a certain number of laws specifically designed for the black populations.

Therefore, whether to exhibit the Colombian “tri-ethnicity” through the folklorization of the *cumbia* or to show through the *mapalé* the “African” specificity of the Caribbean culture and the underlying biological assumptions, the consumption of festive Cartagena cannot be dissociated from a more or less implicit consumption of ethnic and racial identities. This does not exclusively translate ethnic tourism or “tourist-based ethnicity” constructed solely through relations between the local populations and the passing tourists (Wood, 1998). It stems rather from the very ambiguity, more generally characteristic of the multicultural cities of Latin America, in which ethnic and racial dimensions are nearly always present in defining social situations, even though they are not explicitly expressed as such throughout the course of action.

This is what can be observed later in the evening, in the night clubs where the *paseos de noche* make their final stops, but this time based on more contemporary music and dances like the *champeta* or the *reggaeton* which offer the visitor another vision of the Caribbean *rumba* and, at the same time, another local version of the globalized black culture and the specific characteristics attributed to it.

## Conclusion

Tourism functions well on a rationale which allows the passing visitor to consume the objects and signs of an exotic yet domesticated world. The mythified mestizaje and the black culture have in this way become commercialized products, revealing the relations between consumption, reification and control (Hill Collins, 2006 : 299). Nonetheless, Cartagena is not an attraction park where what we have come to visit does not exist (Auge, 1997: 33). The development of tourism, in addition to contributing to the reinforcement of urban fragmentation, has led to the performance of history and standardized, stereotyped identities which in turn affect the relation of the inhabitants to their city. As wrote Lorenza Mondada, “describing the city is not a neutral, transparent activity, disjointed from the reality to which it claims to refer, but is rather a structuring activity which constructs the objects of its discourse through the way in which it organizes them, situates them in relation to others or attributes to them official or marginal voices” (Mondada, 2000). Personally supported by the Colombian president, the discourse on tourism in Cartagena thus frequently appears, in the eyes of the inhabitants themselves, as the new narration on the city, which delegitimizes any other modes of representation. In an interview on the theme of racism, a black leader in Cartagena recalled the strategies of his organization in sensitizing the inhabitants to multicultural politics. The initial activities of the association were not the disclosure of the texts relative to multicultural measures, the emphasis on an “Afro-Colombian identity” that is highly mobilized in the rest of the country, or the denunciation of racial discrimination. Rather, the first activity of the association, its very moment of birth, was a “*paseo en chiva*”. As though the most painful forms of exclusion were those within the practices of tourism; as though the assertion of full citizenship occurred through the tourist consumption of the city, and the consumption of one’s own commercialized “black identity”.

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Photographs



Figure No. 1

*Chivas* at the Popa convent, Cartagena, July 2005



Figure No.2

Souvenir sellers, Castillo de San Felipe, Cartagena, July 2005



Figure No. 3

*Rumba* en the fortifications during the *paseo de noche*, Cartagena, August 2005



Figure No. 4

Painting of *mapalé* dancers on a *chiva*, Cartagena, July 2005



Figure No. 5

Painting of *cumbia* dancers on a *chiva*, Cartagena, July 2005



Figure No. 6

*Cumbia* dancers on the fortifications, Cartagena, August 2005